

Safe Boating Tips

Always wear your life jacket – Cold Water Immersion

In 2023, 13 boaters died in boating-related incidents in Oregon. Five were in motorized boats and eleven were in nonmotorized boats. Eleven victims were NOT wearing life jackets. Our waterways are always cold and sudden immersion in cold water can lead to an involuntary gasp reflex where a person breathes in water, which can lead to water in the lungs -and drowning. Wearing a life jacket will keep a person's head above water so inhaling water is less likely.



Get Educated, Practice “Situational Awareness”

Operator inattention, operator inexperience and alcohol impairment rank nationally as the top three primary contributing factors in boating accidents. Boaters must be vigilant to their surroundings and pay close attention to the conditions and operation of other boaters and water recreationists. Taking a safe boating course is an inexpensive, yet valuable way to become a safe boater. A [free, online paddling course](#) is also available so paddlers can learn the navigation rules of the road. [Classroom and Internet courses](#) are approved by the Marine Board and meet the mandatory education requirements for operators of motorboats over 10 horsepower.

Boat Safe, Boat Sober

Alcohol's effects on judgment, vision, balance, and coordination are amplified on the water, increasing the chances of being involved in a boating accident. Plus, boating under the influence of intoxicants (BUII) is illegal in Oregon –a Class A misdemeanor, and includes inhalants, marijuana, or mixed drug/alcohol impairment. Officers can also arrest boaters for observed impairment below 0.08 percent blood alcohol concentration (BAC). Boaters with a 0.08% BAC immediately lose boating privileges and will pay a hefty, \$6,250 fine. A conviction for a BUII counts toward felony DUII for repeat offenders. They may also be ordered by the court to take a boating safety course and have their boater education card suspended.

Be Aware of Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that is lethal. In 2019, two people succumbed to CO poisoning while sitting on the boat transom and another incident involving two people occurred in 2023 from the use of a propane tank in an enclosed compartment. The most common way to be exposed to CO gas is when a passenger hangs onto the rear of the boat or swimming platform to body surf — known as “teak surfing.” Teak surfing can be deadly and is illegal in Oregon. Early symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, nausea, dizziness, and irritated eyes. The onset of these symptoms is extremely fast, and “teak surfers” can sink into the water before anyone realizes what happened. It is now believed that previously recorded drownings may have been caused by CO poisoning. The use of propane to not only keep warm but for cooking has also been a source of CO poisoning. It's recommended to install a CO monitor inside any enclosed cabin spaces.

Boating Courtesy

Always operate your boat at a safe speed and at a safe distance from the shore. Follow any slow-no wake regulated areas. Watch your wake and its impact on others around you. Keep a look out for other boaters — drive defensively. When launching your boat, have a defined role for each passenger and load your gear before you back down the launch ramp. Be efficient, plan ahead, and use staging areas to pack/unpack your gear when launching and retrieving your boat to prevent bottlenecks at the ramp.

Proper Prior Planning for Prevention

Know the waterway and learn where there are reported waterway obstructions like snags, fallen trees, and strainers. Know where you are putting in and taking out. Use the Marine Board's interactive map to find boat ramps and find out local rules. Do not set out too close to dusk because once the sun starts to set, it gets cold quickly and disorientation happens just as fast. Check the weather and the tides for tidally influenced rivers and bays.

Know Oregon's boating laws, take a boating safety course, have the right equipment, know your limits, and let friends and family know where you're going and when you plan to return. Fill out a Float Plan.

For more boating resources, visit Boat.Oregon.gov

